

The Institution of Engineers, Australia
 Sydney Engineering Heritage Committee
 Oral History Program
INTERVIEW TAPE LOG

Interviewee: Neville Albert WHIFFEN **Tape Numbers:** IEA SYD45 - 46

Interviewer: Richard RAXWORTHY **Number of Tapes:** 2 (two)

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Tape: IEA SYD: 45, Side A		
Time/ Counter	Subject	Proper Names & Keywords
000-078	Birth and early schooling; secondary education; educated completely by the NSW public education from primary to University of NSW; one of the instigators of formation of University, gives details; quotes from history of University of NSW.	Leichhardt Rockdale Kogarah Sydney Technical School Paddington Professor Radcliff Institute of Technology Sydney University University of Technology University of NSW Philip Baxter Professor Norman Drummond Formation of University of NSW
079-163	How and why he became a chemical engineer, a new profession; work and travel conditions. Relates family and school influences; describes first job and bosses.	Chemical engineer Municipal Council of Sydney Mackay Pyrmont Power Station Bunnerong Power Station Sydney County Council Electricity Undertaking Electricity Commission Pacific Power Babcock & Wilcox Cleaning boilers Evaporators High pressure boilers Superintendent of Testing, Mr Maxwell Chief Chemist, George Adam
164-190	Outbreak of war; offered position in armed forces, also tried to enlist in Navy and Airforce, each time pulled out by Electricity Commission. Taught chemical engineering at night.	Engineer Captain Carr Chief Engineer Royal Navy Lubrication of ships Lubrication of vehicles Bunnerong

		Wing Commander Israel
190-230	Finally allowed to be seconded; appointed to Australian Legation in Washington, USA, in 1943 as first Scientific Officer; describes process.	Australian Aluminium Commission Dr Wark CSIRO Washington Australian Legation Sir Richard Casey
231-330	Describes time in US and appointment to Steering Committee; stories about job based in Washington; American attitude towards tropicalisation; meeting at Pentagon regarding who should get military equipment, Macarthur or Eisenhower? Whiffen's photos showed that equipment designed for European conditions quickly deteriorated in the tropics, resulted in Roosevelt ordering formation of Committee on Tropical Deterioration.	Sir Richard Casey Sir Owen Dixon (?) O.S.R.D. Dr Bush Eisenhower Macarthur Brisbane Sir Frederick White Tropicalisation Deterioration of equipment Pentagon Admiral Furer President Roosevelt Army-Airforce-Navy Committee on Tropical Deterioration
331-358	Awarded Medal of Freedom	Medal of Freedom Sir Frederick White Dr Taffy Bowen Dr Evatt Sir Marcus Oliphant Order of Eastern Star Greece
359-409	Leave of absence 1936 -37 to work in UK; reflects on problem of being a lone chemical engineer not fitting into a world of electrical and mechanical engineers. Worked in BBC and hospital in Ireland, visited USA. Visiting Newcastle UK.	UK Parsons Turbines & Rayrow Electrical Switchgear Babcock & Wilcox British General Electric BBC River Tyne Hebburn
410-559	Fouling of marine vessels, describes problems with barnacles encountered by US ships; ship's worms in marine plywood landing craft. Other memories of that time, various jobs concerned with life of aircraft, timber planes, special glues.	UNESCO Washington US Bureau of Ships Norfolk Navy Yard USS Iowa Life of aircraft NASA CSIRO Div. of Aeronautics Chicago Boeing, Chicago DC3 Wooden planes CSIRO Forest Products Special glues Madison, Wisconsin Plywood Research Foundation, Eugene, Oregon Urea formaldehyde Phenolic resins
560-606	Testing of Mosquito (planes). Inquiry into life of aircraft.	Mosquito Metal fatigue Royal Commission

607-	Explains how he obtained isotopes in 1944 and sent them to Australia; people he met during that time.	Dept of Health Dr Eddy Isotopes University of Illinois Carnegie Institution Ernest Lawrence University of California Cyclotron War Department Thorium Uranium
End Side A, Tape 45		

Tape: IEA SYD: 45, Side B		
Time/Counter	Subject	Proper Names & Keywords
000-093	Continues discussion about supply of isotopes. Atom bomb reaches important stage. Talks of people at Oakridge, Tennessee. Return to Australia, then back to US 1945, passed atom bomb at sea, family on board. US issues Smythe Report, Whiffen was asked to explain it to Evatt and Casey. Asked to monitor 2 things: the taking of control of atomic energy away from the Defence Dept and placing in the civilian hands, and to obtain isotopes. Suicide of Dr Paul Abersould.	Oakridge, Tennessee [Sir] Marcus Oliphant Sir Philip Baxter Dr Paul Abersould, Head of Isotopes Division Smythe Report Dr Evatt Sir Richard Casey Isotopes Federation of Atomic Scientists Manhattan District Project Atomic Energy Commission
094-141	US Govt said they would provide isotopes if he could find a case of an Australian serviceman who needed radioactive material, and had served in the same field as US servicemen; wrong case sent, later received correct case. US concern that if they supplied Australia, would have to supply the world, did not want to supply Russia. Wrote part of speech for Roosevelt, on supply of isotopes to free world.	Radioactive phosphorus Isotopes Paul Abersould Russia Roosevelt's speech Cancer Council Davis Cup
142-193	Release of speech; Australia first to receive radioactive isotopes. Atomic Energy Commission formed, Whiffen first Liaison Officer. Attended UNESCO Conference, asked to be recorder and presenter. Public fear of atomic energy.	Radioactive isotopes Atomic Energy Commission Liaison Officer Mexico City Conference on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy UNESCO Pierre Joliet Curé Lord Adrian of UK Indira Gandhi Vienna
194-222	Invited to Westinghouse Centenary; received medal. All professionals - no politics, all work together.	George Westinghouse Westinghouse Brake Co. Pittsburgh Fermee Oppenheimer Lawrence
223-246	After war finished, still working in aircraft industry and asked to work on two major industries, textiles (particularly wool) and food; travels in US.	Aircraft industry Textile industry Wool American Society of Testing Materials Committee American Association of Textile, Chemists and Colorists Fruit production Frozen juice
247-286	Returns to Australia, talks about setting up Wool Research Laboratory, involvement of politics meant that it finished up being three divisions instead of one, very expensive. Recently asked to report on how to reduce costs, suggested making one division.	Wool Research Laboratory CSIRO John Dedman (?) Member for Corio Geelong Melbourne Sydney Hubert Opperman
287-393	Sulphur key element in short supply, Australia must provide for herself. Seconded to become Executive Director of Federal Cabinet Committee on Sulphuric Acid. Superphosphate important for pastures for wool industry. Private industry, State and Commonwealth Governments did	Sulphur Ian Clunies Ross Superphosphate Wool industry Fertilizer

	not work well together. Must be a joint effort, Whiffen identified problems and converted industry to use of pyrites; erection of port facilities. Ultimately helped wool industry. Explains new developments. Created Wool Textile Liaison Office, link between industry and user.	Pyrites Act of Parliament Gladstone Norseman Wool Textile Liaison Office
394-495	Discusses advances in treatment of wool. Introduction of blends. Took same technology into paper industry. Reasons for leaving CSIRO. Asked to join APPM. Arrived in Burnie; quality of paper made from eucalypt fibre not competitive. Implemented blending of fibres, introduced development division.	Shrinkproofing Melamine resins Shrinkage Paper industry Sir Harry Somerset Otways Pulp mill Barwon River Greenies Burnie Geelong Eucalypt fibre New products New Zealand APPITA (Australasian Pulp & Paper Industry Technical Association)
496-640	Problems with eucalypt fibres and printing, solved by blending. Discusses sulphate in the environment. Use of eucalypts, young vs old. Explains forestry development methods used; new plantings.	Problems Sulphate Burnie Titanium Dioxide Sustainable development Eucalypts Forestry development Timber Pulp and paper Fauna Forest culling
641-705	Relates his entry into paint industry. Recalls achievements in paper industry and reasons for leaving.	APPM Harry Somerset Wilfred Brooks Board Berger Paints Olympic Games
End Side B, Tape 45		

Tape: IEA SYD: 46, Side A		
Time/ Counter	Subject	Proper Names & Keywords
000-091	Continues relating entry into paint industry, describes company structure. Outdated products so introduced new ones. Visit by Sir William Vines to Australia. Launch of Berger Breeze, new type of paint. Problems of fungus in new export territories, solution discovered.	Sherwin Williams Australia Berger Australia Company structure PVA's Sir William Vines New colour range Acrylic paints Berger Breeze Fiji Papua New Guinea Lae Fungus Solomons
092-156	Berger becomes target for acquisition, relates reason for leaving. Joins Amalgamated Chemicals, became Managing Director of company Australia-wide; introduced new products. Discusses beginnings of cotton industry in Australia. Supplied, tested, serviced sprays for Auscot, new industry for Auscot and Amalgamated Chemicals; testing on tomato seedlings.	Sir William Vines [Jensen?] Nicholson Berger Amalgamated Chemicals Blythe Chemicals Tasmania Victoria Sir Thomas Ramsay Kiwi Boot Polish New products Cotton industry Auscot Wee Waa Jim Blaisdell (?) ICI Shell Etymologist Biological testing
157-219	Demise of Amalgamated Chemicals, Board not in touch with new technology. Relates how he came to join Abbot Laboratories. Initially went to Pfizer, reasons for choosing Abbot; became Managing Director, offered Vice Presidency, chose to remain in Sydney; introduced new products and companies.	Amalgamated Chemicals Abbott Laboratories Jim De Hasith(?) St Ives PA Management Consultants Pfizer Pacific & Far East operations Chicago Abbot Diagnostics Abbot Hospital Products Tasmanian Alkaloids
220-248	Supplies 25% of total world's needs for opiates; originally promised entire American market by Senator Kennedy, before intervention of American/Turkish politics. Discusses high security of extraction plant. Retirement.	Tasmanian Alkaloids Opiates America Turkey Poppies Tasmania Extraction plant Westbury (?), Tasmania Alkaloids Morphine Johnson & Johnson Abbot Retirement

249-300	Setting up of a new company, asked by General Foods Company of New York to be prime consultant, describes involvement and introduction of total quality regarding products.	Nethal Pty Ltd General Foods Company New York Canberra Nestlé Unilever Tang Victoria Sydney Cadbury Schweppes Total quality
301-325	Talks about being gassed with chlorine during WW2 at Power Station; gas detection officer for Eastern Sydney; Japanese shelling of Sydney.	Chlorine Rose Bay Chlorination
326-407	Continues discussion about Nethal Pty Ltd; selling up of General Foods; very happy relationship with them. Began consulting in aquaculture. Approached to join Canberra Development Board as Executive Director, naming his own terms.	Nethal Pty Ltd General Foods Company Cadbury Schweppes Aquaculture Berger Paints G&G Merchants Western Stores Norman Teek Franklins grocery chain Paul Symon (?) Canberra New Zealand Canberra Development Board Prime Minister [Malcolm] Fraser Sir Lawrence Muir Potter Partners Mr Robert Ellicott Promoting Australia
408-479	Overseas missions with Canberra Development Board; discussions with Japanese. Started National Technology Centre and others; became Chairman and Executive Director of National Science Summer School, describes purpose of school and opening ceremony.	Japan Osaka Nagoya Kobe National Technology Centre Wang computers National Technology Park Lend Lease Fern Hill National Convention Centre Capital Park Royal National Science Summer School Sir Lawrence Muir Bob Hawke Sir Ninian Stephen Lady Valerie Stephen CSIRO CRA National Science Summer School
480-602	Discussion about time with Nethal Pty Ltd and how he got into aquaculture, reflects upon how everything he has done has been linked. Shortage of animal protein in Asia, dependence on fish. Asked to help set up blueberry tourist industry; advised same company to set up furniture production, aquaculture and hydroponics to provide employment for purposed township. Discusses fish production and farming.	Aquaculture United States Sri Lank Thailand Indonesia Animal protein Catfish Coffs Harbour Blueberries

		Corindi Grafton Australian hardwood Silver perch American channel catfish
603-658	Talks about various types of Australian catfish; farming of saltwater fish using pump-ashore seawater current interest.	Australian catfish Lake Argyle
	End Side A, Tape 46	

Tape: IEA SYD: Tape 46, Side B		
Time/ Counter	Subject	Proper Names & Keywords
000-217	Gives details of various institutions he has been involved with, and offices held. Discusses his academic qualifications and courses taken; awards received. Pushed proposal to interrupt education of engineering students with 1 year's practical work in industry during course. Worked very well.	FSTC University of New South Wales Sydney Technical College NSW Institute of Technology Gus Guthrie RKM Medal IEA University of NSW University of Sydney Paul Huggins
218-283	Still active with professional bodies; interest in environment. Involved in precinct committees as Chairman, on environment and traffic committees. Important to keep active in professional associations to help younger people. On reflection, has no regrets; disappointed that young engineers now not allowed to take risks. Wants to stay enthusiastic.	Current interests
	End Side B, Tape 46	
END OF INTERVIEW		